What if all Fraternity and Sorority Life Offices had the opportunity to properly conduct service learning projects to challenge students' connection to their values?

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"Fraternities and sororities value the principles of leadership, community service, academic excellence, and brotherhood/sisterhood." I am sure we have all said something along these lines in our current positions. While these are the core values uniting our organizations, how often are we connecting our everyday actions to these values? It is reasonable to consider utilizing service-learning projects as a way to connect our values to real-life experiences. According to Learn and Serve America (2011), "effective service-learning is conducted when the students or participants would conduct meaningful community service and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities," but what does this look like for our field?

In theory, service-learning is parallel to our values. It has the potential to be an engaging and hands-on experience for our students to learn leadership, self-awareness, civic responsibility, and unity. In the planning stage, service-learning projects are often very expensive and time consuming which may limit the number of opportunities available to our students. In action, service-learning projects are sometimes mistaken as vacations, charity work, and/or punishments. If there are many distractions, the expectations and purpose of service-learning projects may become lost. Projects focusing more on fun outings, zip-lining, sporting games, and fancy dinners may adversely affect the impact. Likewise, if there is no partnership with the community and students, the service may be negatively received. Yes, service-learning takes a lot of time and effort, but can it positively affect the fraternal community?

I believe properly conducted service-learning can positively affect the fraternal community. The College of William and Mary does a wonderful job defining community engagement, service-learning, and the six models for service-learning on their Sharpe Community Scholars web page. This is a great place to begin the conversation of service-learning as well as find resources to support the development of the project. Campbellsville University offers a variety of ideas for multiple groups to conduct service-learning projects. Although fraternities and sororities are not listed, organizations or FSL offices can select a project by theme or philanthropy. After the project is selected, the development of the actual project can begin. Tennessee State University offers a digital manual outlining how to create a service-learning project with examples and resources. John Carroll University is currently doing an outstanding job on service-learning. John Carroll University, via their Center for Service & Social Action, offers a variety of opportunities through service-learning courses, weekly service activities, one-time service projects and events, and social justice advocacy.

What if all our campuses were able to proudly share our service-learning opportunities like those mentioned above? What if all our students were able to experience the profound

learning that takes place during these experiences? How would it impact the type of college graduates and alumni/alumnae of our organizations we produce? By spending time and resources prioritizing our value of community engagement, we can create opportunities that can shape our students and define the fraternal experience. Service-learning is an excellent way to challenge our students' connections to their values, provide service to needed communities, and further develop tomorrow's leaders.

References

Learn and Serve America Fact Sheet. (2011, March). Retrieved August 07, 2016, from
http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/marketing/fact-sheets/learn-and-serve-america